

Komnenian Double Surnames on Lead Seals

Problems of Methodology and Understanding

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With the widespread appearance of family names, especially through the rise of the Komnenoi, the Byzantines progressively added names to their patronyms, including all the family ties they thought important to their self-presentation. Consequently, Byzantine society went from having, e.g., Alexios Komnenos, to Constantine Doukas Komnenos, to Michael Doukas Angelos Komnenos Palaiologos, to, ultimately, John Doukas Angelos Palaiologos Raoul Laskaris Tornikes Philanthropenos Asanes.¹ Although primary sources are not consistent in citing historical figures by all their names, the existence of multiple surnames can be traced through several centuries and almost no study on the Byzantine Empire of the late twelfth century onward is spared such examples. This article aims to review our knowledge of Byzantine names with the narrow focus on instances of Komnenian double surnames on lead seals, strikingly few specimens of which survive. It will be shown that although modern scholarship would seem to present this question otherwise, in fact, the widespread use of double surnames is rather a historiographical byproduct than a historical phenomenon. This implies confusion in our understanding of Byzantine society's naming practices and our lack of a common

methodology for systematization. A more productive conclusion is that the Byzantines had indeed a very dynamic culture, open to personal tastes and individual name manipulations on seals.

This research stemmed from a set of general onomastic and sigillographic questions that arose in the process of another study. It will be necessary to describe these questions, so as to explain the problems posed and the initial stimulus for this article, thus going from a local point-in-question to a more global discussion. The original study, which dealt with the early biography of the founder of the "Nicaean Empire,"² cites the article by A.-K. Wassiliou, where the seals of Theodore I Laskaris and his brother Constantine are transcribed and published, to tie their iconographical choice of St. George Diasorites with their origins in Asia Minor.³ These seals provide valuable information about the scarcely documented early Laskarides and, additionally, they are important sigillographic material, given the rarity of preserved seals of brothers. The seals were seemingly made contemporaneously, before the taking of imperial power by Theodore. This is evidenced by his titles of "protovestiarites" and "sebastos," which he bore prior to his marriage to Alexios III's second daughter

1 The last: "an obscure 15th-century gentleman, whose name appears only on an icon." D. Nicol, "The Prosopography of the Byzantine Aristocracy," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold (Oxford, 1984), 83.

2 A. A. Volkoff, "Ранние годы биографии Феодора I Ласкариса," *VizVrem* 72 (97) (2013): 103–24.

3 A.-K. Wassiliou, "O agios Georgios o Diasorites auf Siegeln: Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte der Laskariden," *BZ* 90 (1997): 416–26.

Anna Angelina in 1199,⁴ while Constantine mentions no title or office and so his seal can also be dated to before 1204.⁵ However, these seals present a striking divergence: one is ascribed to Theodore *Kommenos Laskaris*, the other to Constantine *Laskaris Komnenos*.

+	СКЕΠΟΙC
CFPAΓIC	KOMHNONΛA
ΛACKAPI	CKAPINKΩN
KOMNHNΘ	ΦANTINONOV
ΘEOΔΩPOY	KAIΓPAΦACC
ΠPOTOBECTI	ΦPAΓIZEMAP
APITΘCEBA	TVPΩNKΛE
CTΘΠEΛΩ	OC
Σφραγίς Λάσκαρη	Σκέποις Κομνηνόν
Κομνηνού Θεοδώρου	Λάσκαριν Κωνσταντίνον
πρωτοβεστιάριτου	οὔ καὶ γραφᾶς σφράγιζε,
σεβαστοῦ πέλω	μαρτύρων κλέος

Both those seals are metrical, and in each case both family names are of equal syllable length so that their order does not affect the meter. This poses a glaring dilemma: why two brothers, from the same family and the same geographical background, at the same time (and possibly in the same place—Constantinople) would elect to use different orders for presenting their same two surnames on two stylistically very similar seals? The reason might be that each brother emphasized a different name over the other. But if a choice,

how do we read those seals to know which brother is deliberately emphasizing which name?

To understand the difference, to appreciate what each seal-bearer wanted to say about himself and the message he intended for his audience, it is necessary to examine nomenclature standards. Although seal-bearers undeniably had much liberty in their self-representations, there has to have been some kind of generally followed naming tradition in order for the bearer to be recognized, some parameters for identification within Byzantine aristocratic society, which one then proceeded to work within in a manner recognizable to the other members of this group. The point-in-question is to know what order of parents' surnames was the established norm and which "slot" was considered the most emphatic. That is, among the possible orders, what was the generally normative combined order:

Parental surname order only: N. Maternal Paternal or N. Paternal Maternal

Emphasis order only: N. *Surname* Surname or N. Surname *Surname*

Combined orders: N. *Maternal* Paternal or N. Maternal *Paternal* or N. *Paternal* Maternal or N. Paternal *Maternal*

The recourse to secondary literature does not offer a definite answer. Notably both H. Moritz and E. Patlagean have written on some specifics of Byzantine names,⁶ and D. Polemis attempted generally to differentiate their establishment practices,⁷ but there has been no direct explanation of Byzantine naming mechanisms. Nor does this question seem to have been taken into account in the headings of biographical entries on individuals with several family names, though prosopographical studies often list multiple surnames. But as Donald Nicol wrote: "the use and abuse of family

4 After the marriage Theodore had a different seal. G. Zacos and A. Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (Basel, 1972), 1.3: no. 2753. In about 1203 he was made "despotes" and had yet another seal. DO 55.1.4355. Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 1.1: no. 116. DOSeals 6:192, no. 101.1. His ultimate, imperial, seal bore the image of Christ on the obverse. I. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria* (Sofia, 2003), 3.1: nos. 205–6.

5 After the capture of Constantinople in April 1204, Constantine, although initially a pretender to the throne, aided his imperial brother Theodore in his military campaigns and diplomatic relations and as such had to have had a title. It is known that three other brothers of Theodore I (George, Alexios, and Isaac) were made "sebastokratores" (B. Ferjančić, "Севастократори у Византији (Les sébastokratores à Byzance)," *ZRVI* 11 [1968]: 173–74, 192), so it would seem inevitable for Constantine to have borne some title as well. Ruth Macrides ties a "Konstantinos despotes" in a Bodleian manuscript (Bodleian Barocc. ms. 235, fol. 478v) with this Constantine Laskaris. R. Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford, 2007), 168.

6 H. Moritz, *Die Zuname bei den byzantinischen Historikern und Chronisten* (Landshut, 1897–98), 1–2 bande. E. Patlagean, "Lés débuts d'une aristocratie byzantine et le témoignage de l'historiographie: système des noms et liens de parenté aux IX^e–X^e siècles," in Angold, *Byzantine Aristocracy*, 23–42.

7 The third part of D. Polemis's book contains "instances of those who had abandoned their patronymic proper and assumed the name . . . to which they had a right through the female line"—a somewhat vague differentiation, which the author himself states has not been fully pursued. D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London, 1968), 189.

names by the Byzantine aristocracy creates many problems” and “the rules of the game in this late Byzantine name-dropping are hard to follow.”⁸ Hence, up to today scholars do not have a clear idea of how Byzantine surnames worked and what the name order was during any period, not even for simple double surnames.

Attempting to resolve the aforementioned Laskarid example, we can convincingly set the premise that Theodore I was a Komnenos by his maternal line,⁹ based on the fact that the primary surnames were generally patronyms and Theodore is named in Greek, Latin, and Oriental histories, as well as in official acts and in the letter of Pope Innocent III, solely as a Laskaris.¹⁰ In inscriptions and patriarchal letters he is addressed either as a Laskaris or by both surnames.¹¹ On coins Theodore used either both surnames or none at all.¹² Apart from one seal, where he is only “Komnenos”¹³ (possibly to underline his marriage to Anna, daughter of Alexios III Angelos, now renamed Komnenos¹⁴), nowhere in written sources is his Komnenian lineage particularly stressed. Therefore, was Theodore merely stating his full double surname on his seals, without particular emphasis? And then, was Constantine accenting his maternal name by placing it second, it being the most emphatic slot, preferring “Komnenos” over “Laskaris” (an understandable choice, but also

telling of Theodore’s conservatism)? This is assuming, of course, that it was not Theodore and the historical sources that deliberately chose to highlight his Laskaris name (not being his patronymic) for their own reasons, which would thus contradict our original premise. It also remains unclear whether any of his direct heirs took up the “Laskaris” family name at any point.¹⁵

Analyzing various other examples of double-surname use provides no support in favor of a definite conclusion about name order, especially in the absence of other siblings using the same two surnames. Even with the illustrious examples of the whole Laskarid dynasty—Theodore I Komnenos Laskaris, John III Doukas Vatatzes, and Theodore II Doukas Laskaris—it is impossible to identify a general pattern. Trying to validate a hypothesis by corroborating it with other evidence has not been conclusive, since there are always too many unknown variables, too many possible interpretations. In most instances, it is unclear either which surname derives from which parent (if in fact it was a parent), or which name is being emphasized, or whether the same principles apply to other examples securely. We witness a seeming liberty of individual choices and remain unable to appreciate their nuances for lack of knowledge of the established default formula.

As a consequence of this ambiguity, we undertook a study of double surnames, setting the parameter of working only with seals. Seals are a unique primary source, displaying the public persona an individual wished to project in society. Furthermore, seals spare us the particular problems found working with other written sources such as narrative texts and legal documents (which have authors’ biases and technical judicial aspects). These sources actually rarely cite double surnames before the second half of the thirteenth century. We hoped that in their sheer number seals would reveal a pattern of established surname orders, and we expected to uncover other examples of seals of brothers for comparison with the above mentioned Laskarid pair. The amount of seals at Dumbarton Oaks being sizeable, we limited our research to instances of Komnenian double-surname usage found in that collection. These

8 D. Nicol, “Prosopography,” 81.

9 This view is shared in: J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris, 1990), 443–44.

10 Notable exceptions are the accounts of Nicholas Mesarites and the 1219 treaty between Nicaea and the Venetians, where Theodore is named as “Komnenos Laskaris.”

11 V. Laurent, *Les registres des Actes des Patriarches de Constantinople* (Paris, 1971), 1.4: nos. 1206, 1207, 1209. N. Oikonomidès “Cinq actes inédits du Patriarche Michel Autôreianos,” *REB* 25 (1967): 120, 122, 125; with both surnames cited on page 123, lines 31 and 43. A. Boeckius, *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* (Berlin, 1882–87), 4: nos. 8746–47; with both surnames in nos. 8744–45, 8748. For nos. 8747 and 8748 see respectively pages 706 and 593 in A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein nebst Addenda zu den Bänden 1 und 2* (Vienna, 2014). Two further inscriptions with only the “Laskaris” surname: G. de Jerphanion, “Les inscriptions Cappadociens et l’histoire de l’Empire de Nicée,” *OCP* 1 (1935): 239–40.

12 M. F. Hendy, *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire, 1081–1261* (Washington, DC, 1969), 228–30. *DOC* 4.1:456–66.

13 His marriage seal: Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine lead seals*, 1: no. 2753.

14 Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 1.1: no. 110; *DOSeals* 6: 186–187, nos. 96.1–3. *DOC* 4.1:400–401.

15 His eldest daughter (and future empress) is at first cited as “Eirene Komnena.” She later took up her husband’s surname of Doukas, displacing “Komnena.” It does not seem she had ever used “Laskaris.” Polemis, *Doukai*, 140. It is not known what were the surnames of his other children (he had two other daughters and three sons, two of which died young).

rigid parameters focused our research and facilitated whenever possible the process of identifying seal owners and of locating them in genealogies, since the Komnenoi have been much studied.¹⁶ It is important to stress that this research is based on how seals have been catalogued and filed, as they are cited in publications and cards, i.e., on indexed names and names put on seal description headings. This could be considered our margin of error, because it was not within the scope of this study to look over and reread each seal individually. However, as will be discussed below, cataloguers overall did not fail to note second surnames on seals, even if there are discrepancies in their publications, hence our margin of error is relatively minimal.

Having reviewed sixteen major seal publication catalogues, we found only nine which used double surnames as a category for cataloguing seals. Certain editions may not have them due to the absence of double-surnamed seals in their given collection, but others nonetheless mention double surnames within seal descriptions¹⁷ or in related catalogues.¹⁸ Of those nine catalogues, three publish merely one or two seals attributed to owners with a Komnenian double surname.¹⁹ Two other catalogues cite personalities by double surnames in their indexes, but inconsistently. Further examples are found within the volume, in the descriptive headings.²⁰ In Schlumberger's monumental work there are no Komnenian double surnames indexed, leading to

the daunting task of browsing some six hundred pages to find five seals headed in such a manner.²¹ An even more striking find is that only seventeen cards out of some ten thousand in the Dumbarton Oaks archive, classified under "Family Names K," "Lay Offices," and "Ecclesiastical Offices," were indexed with a Komnenian double surname.

The final source of data for this study consists of:

- The Dumbarton Oaks Seals Collection card index.
- G. Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'Empire byzantine* (Paris, 1884).
- V. Laurent, *Les bulles métriques dans la sigillographie byzantine* (Athens, 1932).
- V. Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du Médallier vatican* (Città del Vaticano, 1962).
- G. Zacos and A. Vegliery, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (Basel, 1972), 3 volumes.
- N. Oikonomidès, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, DC, 1986).
- I. Koltsida-Makri, *Βυζαντινά μολυβδόβουλλα συλλογής Ορφανίδη-Νικολαΐδη Νομισματικού Μουσείου Αθηνών* (Athens, 1996).
- I. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria* (Sofia, 2003), 3 volumes.
- J. Nesbitt and C. Morrisson, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. 6, *Emperors, Patriarchs of Constantinople, Addenda* (Washington, DC, 2009).
- J.-C. Cheynet and D. Theodoridis, *Sceaux byzantins de la collection D. Theodoridis: Les sceaux patronymiques* (Paris, 2010).

Within this material, after eliminating duplicates, the total number of recorded individuals with seals bearing double surnames comes to the surprisingly modest number of twenty-eight. Among those, two are females and none are of someone who held an ecclesiastical office.

In three instances pairs of same names could be conflated, but were not for the following reasons. The first, "Alexios Palaiologos Komnenos" (nos. 27 and 28) has five seals, four of which are identical and are clearly that of Alexios despotes, son-in-law of Alexios III

16 Particularly the work of K. Varzos, *Η γενεαλογία των Κομνηνών*, 2 vols. (Thessalonica, 1984).

17 W. Seibt, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel in Österreich*, vol. 1 (Vienna, 1978); A.-K. Wassiliou-Seibt and W. Seibt, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel in Österreich*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 2004); J.-C. Cheynet, C. Morrisson, and W. Seibt, *Les sceaux byzantins de la collection Henri Seyrig* (Paris, 1991).

18 For example, V. Laurent used double surnames when cataloguing the Vatican collection, but not for the C. Orghidan one. V. Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du Médallier vatican* (Vatican, 1962); idem, *Documents de sigillographie byzantine: La collection C. Orghidan* (Paris, 1952).

19 I. Koltsida-Makri, *Βυζαντινά μολυβδόβουλλα συλλογής Ορφανίδη-Νικολαΐδη Νομισματικού Μουσείου Αθηνών* (Athens, 1996); DOSeals 6; J.-C. Cheynet and D. Theodoridis, *Sceaux byzantins de la collection D. Theodoridis: Les sceaux patronymiques* (Paris, 2010).

20 Thus Oikonomides lists one double surname in his index, but we find within the catalogue three more. N. Oikonomidès, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, DC, 1986); V. Laurent indexed seven, plus there are three more within the publication. V. Laurent, *Les bulles métriques dans la sigillographie byzantine* (Athens, 1932).

21 G. Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'Empire byzantine* (Paris, 1884).

	Name	Century	Category
1	Maria Angelina Komnena ^a	12	III
2	Alexios Branas Komnenos	12	II
3	Constantine Doukas Komnenos	12	II
4	Alexios Katakourianos Komnenos ^b	12	III
5	Anna Komnenodoukaina	12	III
6	Adrian Komnenodoukas	12	I
7	George Komnenodoukas	13	I
8	Isaac Komnenodoukas	12	II
9	Isaac Komnenodoukas	12	II
10	Isaac Komnenodoukas	12	I
11	Manuel Komnenodoukas	12/13	I
12	Manuel Komnenodoukas	12	I
13	Pantherios (Leo) Komnenodoukas ^c	12	III
14	Theodore Komnenodoukas	12	II
15	Alexios Komnenos Angelos	12	III
16	John Komnenos Doukas	13	I
17	Manuel Komnenos Doukas	12	II
18	John Komnenos Kantakouzenos	13	I
19	Alexios Komnenos Kontostephanos	12	II
20	Stephen Komnenos Kontostephanos	12	III
21	Theodore Komnenos Laskaris	12	I
22	Alexios Komnenos Strategopolous	13	III
23	John Komnenos Vatatzes	12	III
24	Andronikos Kontostephanos Komnenos	12	III
25	John Kontostephanos Komnenos	12	II
26	Constantine Laskaris Komnenos	12	I
27	Alexios Palaiologos Komnenos	12	III
28	Alexios Palaiologos Komnenos	12/13	I

Table. Komnenoi double surnames. I: Surnames II: Direct family relation III: Abstract familial reference. See discussion below on categories.

a The first name is illegible. The editor proposes “Maria,” which credibly fits the available space. I. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals*, 2: no. 3B; 3.2: nos. 1798–99.

b This specimen is catalogued not as a double surname but as “Alexis Katakourianos, du sang des Comnènes,” a literal translation of the seal inscription. Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, 670. He is identified as a certain Katakourianos from the late eleventh century (E. de Muralt, *Essai de chronographie byzantine* [St. Petersburg, 1871], 2:22, no. 8), though it is not certain from written sources that that Alexios Katakourianos was actually related to the Komnenian clan, even less so “of their blood.” The dating of the seal can also be placed later. In view of how other researchers catalogued similar examples, it is included in the list and dated to the twelfth century.

c The first name is supposed to be derived from the term “θηριωννυμουμενός” (beast-like), which can be interpreted as “Leo” or “Pantherios,” the latter being put forward in the catalogue for the only specimen known. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals*, 2: no. 352.

(fig. 1).²² The fifth one (fig. 2) presents several problems for being considered to belong to the same Alexios.²³ In the first place, whereas Alexios despotes states that he is ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΩ ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΘΥΔ ΔΕΣΠΟΤΩ, the other one calls himself simply ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΩ ΚΟΜΝΗΝΩ and without any title. Further, this second Alexios has an image of the Virgin on the obverse while the other displays solely text and has somewhat larger seals. Although all this could be explained by a rise in career or status, there is no clear proof that this is the same person. The second name is that of “Manuel Komnenodoukas” (nos. 11 and 12) of whom there are six separate seals preserved, all stylistically very similar and with exactly the same inscriptions. But three display St. Merkourios and date possibly to the thirteenth century (fig. 3),²⁴ whereas the other three, from the twelfth century, depict St. Theodore (fig. 4).²⁵ The third is that of “Isaac Komnenodoukas” (nos. 8 and 9), who pose less of a doubt of being two people, as one claims he is Komnenodoukas ΜΗΤΡΟΠΑΤΡΟΘΕΝ (fig. 5),²⁶ while the other ΑΛΛΑ ΠΑΤΡΟΠΑΠΠΟΘΕΝ (fig. 6),²⁷ which is not definitive proof, but makes it less probable that this is the same individual.

The total number of sealings (54) is somewhat larger than that of the individuals (28), since multiple copies of seals from eleven persons survive. Theodore Laskaris and Alexios Branas each provide us with three different double-surname sealings—a significant

number²⁸ and rare evidence for any individual. They are thus the only ones to have groups of seals with a set format of inscribing their two family names (although Branas introduces some slight variations²⁹). The seals range in size from 27 to 45 millimetres (34–36 mm being the mode), twenty-three of them are metric and only one has abbreviations. Exactly half of the seals depict an image on the obverse, six of which are of St. George, three of the Theotokos, and two of St. Theodore (the rest are St. Demetrios, St. Stephen, and St. Merkourios).

Strikingly, the total number of individuals and the total number of their seals is very small: in proportion to the thousands of seals catalogued and published, they make up much less than one per cent of the whole—by no means a statistically significant number. Had we widened our study to include other catalogues and non-Komnenian examples, it is improbable that the number would have substantially increased. This relatively small amount of double-surname seals points to a first conclusion: seals do not seem to record as widespread a use of double surnames as modern scholarship would have us believe. Because the lead seal was above all a very personal item, wherein each individual had a unique opportunity to present himself as he considered most beneficial, we see that in reality comparatively few people chose to take advantage of the family alliances available to them (though many certainly had them). It can mean that either this was not common usage in society in general and hence is not reflected on seals, or for some reason it was merely not popular to write it out on seals, a dubious conjecture.

Second, the seals analyzed are firmly rooted in the twelfth century, with only four seals dated to the thirteenth century, and two others to the late twelfth/early thirteenth century. Clearly then this double-surname phenomenon belongs to the twelfth century,

22 Fogg 535, Fogg 1699, DO 58.106.3572. Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 1.3: no. 2752. Oikonomides, *Collection*, no. 130. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals*, 2: no. 541, 3.1: no. 412.

23 DO 58.106.5426.

24 DO 55.1.3919. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals*, 2: no. 351, 3.2: no. 1941. Laurent, *Les bulles métriques*, no. 243. The specimen mentioned in Laurent is from J. Ebersolt, “Sceaux byzantins du Musée de Constantinople,” *RN* 18 (1914): 215–16 no. 169. Having examined the seal in question from plate VIII fig. 7, we conclude that it displays St. Merkourios and not St. Theodoros, based on its similarity with DO 55.1.3919 and the one in the Bulgarian collection (the border, the saint’s name being only on one side, the hand of the saint holding the shield). The assumption that it could be dated to the thirteenth century is from Laurent and our examination of the one in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection.

25 DO 55.1.3918, DO 58.106.4700. Cheynet and Theodoridis, *Sceaux byzantins*, no. 107.

26 Fogg 532. Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 1.3: no. 2736. Laurent, *Les bulles métriques*, no. 639. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals*, 2: no. 350, 3.2: no. 1940.

27 DO 58.106.5630.

28 If we add to Theodore the seal where he is presented as a single-surnamed “Komnenos” (see above, note 13), this makes a total of four different seals from a single individual.

29 In his first seal, as *pansebastos*, he is “Ἀλεξίου ἐκ πατρώθεν Βρανᾶν μὲν ἐκ δὲ μητρόθεν Κομνηνοφύου.” Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 1.3: no. 2734. In his second seal, as *protosebastos*, he is “Ἀλεξίου . . . Βρανᾶ μὲν ἐκ πατρός γεναρχίας ῥίζην δὲ μητρός Κομνηνοβλάστου κλάδου.” Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du Médallier Vatican* (n. 19 above), no. 64. The third one is of him as *panhypersebastos*: “Ἀλέξιος . . . με Βρανᾶς δεσπότης Κομνηνοφύης ἐκ γένους τοῦ μητρόθεν.” Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals*, 2: nos. 121–22, 3.1: nos. 462–63.



FIG. 1 Seal of Alexios Palaiologos Komnenos, twelfth century, DO 58.106.3572 (photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)



FIG. 2 Seal of Alexios Palaiologos Komnenos, twelfth/thirteenth century, DO 58.106.5426 (photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)



FIG. 3 Seal of Manuel Komnenodoukas, thirteenth century, DO 55.1.3919 (photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)



FIG. 4 Seal of Manuel Komnenodoukas, twelfth century, DO 55.1.3918 (photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)



FIG. 5 Seal of Isaac Komnenodoukas, twelfth century, Fogg 1951.31.5.532 (photo courtesy Harvard Art Museums / Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of Thomas Whittemore)



FIG. 6 Seal of Isaac Komnenodoukas, twelfth century, DO 58.106.5630 (photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)

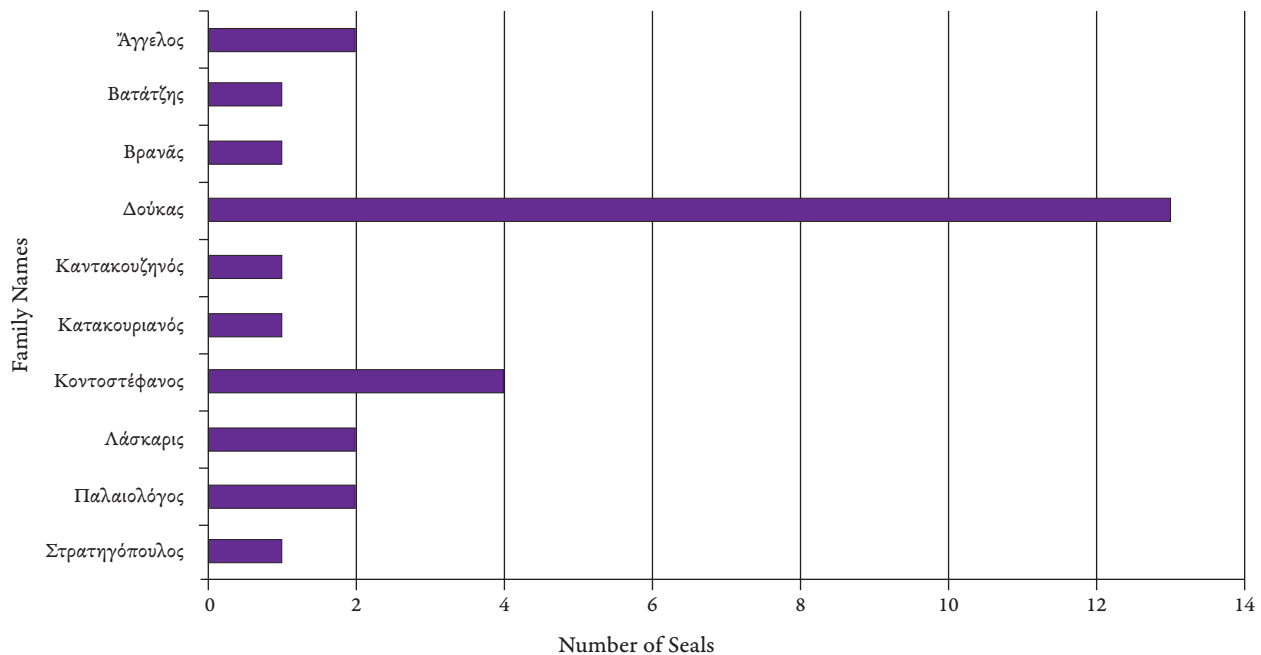


FIG. 7 Seals with double surnames that include the Komnenian surname (drawn by author)

preceded the century before by the appearance of single patronyms on seals, and thereafter succeeded by triple-and-more surnames at the end of the thirteenth and throughout the fourteenth centuries. And while the tenth to eleventh centuries present a more homogeneous tradition of inscribing seals this was not replaced by another fixed pattern in the later periods. The fashion of individualizing one's seal (with metrical inscriptions, unique iconographic choices, etc.) for the benefit of standing out among one's peers, does not seem to be associated with the double-surname occurrences on seals: there are too few examples to make them in any way part of this general cultural trend.

Third, the most widespread usage of double surnames is attested among the Doukai (fig. 7). They far outnumber the other families, representing nearly half of all cases. While the Doukai often integrated their name with "Komnenos," resulting in a standardized "Komnenodoukas" surname,³⁰ they certainly needed less a boost of legitimacy than did the other families listed.

30 ODB 1:655. The integrated "Komnenodoukas" variant still requires a more profound study with regard to its use as opposed to the writing of the two names separately. This may have been merely a stylistic choice, but perhaps it had wider nomenclature implications.

Consequently, there is no clear correlation between a family on the rise and the insertion of a Komnenian family name in order to enhance one's status. Because most families could claim some sort of Komnenian tie, this must mean that the insertion of a second surname was not normatively established and hence probably most seal-bearers did not seek or deem it appropriate to put one in. This is perhaps supported by the overall liberty in Byzantine society with regard to expressing family connections, which, as we shall see in another example below, allowed for even an immediate degree of consanguinity to be presented in an abstractly distant manner.

The analysis of the twenty-eight seals leads to several other surprising findings. Above all, it becomes clear that what is catalogued in the format of a double surname is often deceptive. As it happens, only ten seals of the twenty-eight (which thus form a first category) might be defined as properly using two surnames, i.e., they cite "Komnenos" and another family name as a proper pronoun without genealogical specifications. That is the case for Theodore and Constantine Laskarides, for six of the Komneno-Doukai, for John Komnenos Kantakouzenos, as well as for one Alexios Palaiologos Komnenos. But most seals in fact cannot be unequivocally categorized as having two proper surnames, for



FIG. 8 Seal of Constantine Doukas Komnenos, twelfth century, DO 58.106.5583 (photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)



FIG. 9 Seal of Theodore Komnenodoukas, twelfth century, DO 58.106.5588 (photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)



FIG. 10 Seal of Alexios Komnenos Angelos, twelfth century, DO 55.1.3806 (photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)



FIG. 11 Seal of Anna Komnenodoukaina, twelfth century, DO 55.1.4562 (photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)

they display a whole array of semantic flexibility in presenting one's family ties. Thus, we can abstractly define two more categories from our group of seals. The second category is characterized by those individuals using one or two family names in citing a direct, close family connection (but not as a surname), such as was seen with one Isaac Komnenodoukas ΜΗΤΡΟΠΑΤΡΟΘΕΝ and the other ΑΛΛΑ ΠΑΤΡΟΠΑΠΠΟΘΕΝ. Eight seal-bearers referred to surnames coming from their mother, father, or both, thus not stating their actual names (or only one as such), but rather presenting themselves in what appears to be an archaizing pre-surname form (i.e., "I am N., son of M/known as X"). Other examples of this would be Constantine ΔΟΥΚΑ ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΟΘΕΝ ΚΑΙ ΜΗΤΡΟΘΕΝ (fig. 8) and Theodore ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΔΟΥΚΑΝ ΠΑΤΡΟΘΕΝ ΚΑΙ ΜΗΤΡΟΘΕΝ (fig. 9).

A third category (of ten seals) is that of referencing a family name by a distant, not well-defined lineage, e.g., Alexios Strategopoulos states he was a Komnenos ΕΚ ΓΕΝΟΥΣ. Other linguistic devices were

also used, such as ΚΛΑΔΟΣ, -ΦΥΟΝ, and ΦΥΤΛΗ or even a combination of these. This poses the problem of how to properly classify these individuals or cite them in works. Can someone Komnenos ΕΚ ΓΕΝΟΥΣ be indexed as having the Komnenos surname? Surely this would have been a dynastic prerogative not easily available to others. A further complication arises when trying to identify certain individuals with such seals, since several of them have proven to be directly descended from the Komnenoi. For Alexios (III) Angelos it might have been merely simpler to say that he was ΚΟΜΝΗΝΩΝΚΛΑΔΟΣ ΚΕΡΑΥΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΩΝΤΟΣ ΑΓΓΕΛΩΝΜΟΣ (fig. 10), rather than specifying that he had Komnenian blood from his grandmother Theodora, daughter of Alexios I Komnenos. Another example is that of Anna Komnena, who is known to have been very attached to her Doukan ties, and wrote her seals as ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΔΟΥΚΩΝ ΕΚ ΓΕΝΟΥΣ (fig. 11). This might seem a useless degree of distancing since those are the surnames of her parents (and first fiancé), yet she clearly deliberately chose not to use them as

proper surnames, adding ΕΚ ΓΕΝΘC and thus accenting a more broad family connection to both names in her self-presentation—an interesting fact in itself with wide implications concerning this particular historical figure, but at the same time raising many questions about the mechanisms of Byzantine names in general.

Thus, we see that there are actually not that many examples of double surnames on seals and what is catalogued as a double surname is not necessarily one in the proper sense. Or indeed, what is a “double surname”? Is being distantly “out of the *genos*” enough to carry the name or to be considered a representative of that branch (especially seeing as one could use this formula rhetorically, being in reality direct family)? How were surnames determined and given in Byzantine society? What was the level of normativity of seals when it comes to family name use? And how different could they be made from formal “bureaucratic” names? Or did one have absolute *carte blanche* in self-presentation on a seal? Then what was a name in Byzantium, in fact?

A “double surname” might be provisionally defined as being the use of two family names in their strict proper noun forms without specifying genealogical relationship. All the surname variants then (such as in categories II and III) should be treated separately. In the given group of seals most individuals stressed a family connection by applying various combinations of genealogical relationships (μητρόθεν, πατρόθεν, πατροπαππόθεν, μητροπατρόθεν, κλάδος, ἐκ γένους, -φυοῦ, φύτλη), but did not inevitably use this connection as a surname, or indeed use a surname as such at all. It is possible that mentioning a family connection in one’s name was an unofficial device and done not only out of some personal preference (for we have seen that there appears not to have been a direct relation to self-promotion with adding “Komnenos” to one’s name), but as a reinforcement for identity recognition as well. For example, Alexios Angelos, perhaps, cited his ancestral relation to the Komnenoi not only for the prestige of associating himself with the dynasty, but also to potentially differentiate himself from any other possible “Alexios Angelos,” even legitimately so-named. However, we would find him in seal catalogues registered under “Alexios Komnenos Angelos,” which is neither how he wrote his own name, nor can it be acknowledged to be a proper double surname

from his seals.³¹ As a consequence, the concept of double surnames could be termed a “historiographical phenomenon” for which in reality there is shaky foundation. This phenomenon came about as a result of cataloguing exceedingly large numbers of seals, aiming to prepare certain collections for publication and citation, without much time to read and analyze each seal individually and collectively. So we found inconsistencies in cataloguing itself, with no system of recording surnames that mention an additional family name (whatever form it may take), and with sigillographers having no general agreement about how to read and register each seal of this sort. For instance, we may find in Zacos and Veglery “Alexios Branas Komnenos,” while Jordanov lists him as “Alexios Komnenos Branas.” This then indicates a problem of understanding how surnames worked, i.e., which surname would go in the first place, which in the second, or which one is in fact being accentuated over the other. This brings back the original motive for this study of finding the established general combined order normative for parents’ name and surname emphasis, which remains unanswered.

To conclude, few seals bearing what is considered a double surname exist and indeed there does not seem to have been a firmly established format of using double surnames, nor in fact proper double surnames in the formal sense in Byzantine society. This conclusion is tied to sigillographic evidence, but might find support in other sources. The seals in themselves present a particular means of self-identification, with a great allowance for personalized expression and for preferences of self-presentation. As such, they did not necessarily need to reflect a very strict, “legal” form of one’s name, though at the same time, considering the use of seals, one’s name had to be securely and recognizably presented to benefit those receiving a seal and to avoid transgressing any of the normative customs of one’s social group. Hence the names engraved on seals must have been founded on a generally accepted standard for bearing and writing surnames, though such a standard is unknown to us, which prevents us from appreciating the messages intended by any divergence from it. From the point of view of


31 Apart from using the distant ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΚΛΑΔΘ, his other family name, “Angelos,” is also written in a very unique, rhetorical manner: ΑΓΓΕΛΩΝΥΜΘ. See fig. 10.

sigillography, the use of two surnames was a rarely used but extremely flexible instrument that allowed for enormous personal preference and social creativity in presenting names. Any future development of this question has necessarily to include epigraphic and other historical sources, and base each case biography on prosopographical and genealogical studies, although written sources before the restoration of the Byzantine Empire to Constantinople do not seem to yield any data on double surnames. A possible impetus to our understanding of such surnames might come from a comparative study of later European aristocratic naming practices, for family ties were a fundamental aspect of that social group as well. Perhaps working backward from established modern multiple-surname family names might also provide some

additional information,³² though this approach is limited by how far back they can be traced.

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32 The perhaps most illustrious example of the twentieth century contains several renowned Byzantine surnames, though how exactly it came to be formed is unclear: Antonio “Totò” Griffo Focas Flavio Angelo Ducas Comneno Porfirogenito Gagliardi De Curtis di Bisanzio. A 2007 publication on the family of the Angelo Comneno Ducas does not address the question of its name formation, but presents a vast source collection of its genealogy. S. Angelo Comneno, *Storia e genealogia della Imperiale Famiglia Angelo Comneno Ducas o Angelo Flavio Comneno Duca* (Rome, 2007).

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